The National Library of France (Bibliothèque - Nationale), by Monsieur Julien Havet,

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REMOTE STORAGE

The National Library of France.*

(Bibliothèque Nationale.)

THE National Library, styled before the French Revolution "la Bibliothèque du Roi," then, according to the various changes in government, "la Bibliothèque nationale," "la Bibliothèque impériale," "la Bibliothèque royale," and now again "la Bibliothèque nationale," has its remote origin in the collections of books which the French Kings possessed for their own use. No exact date can be assigned for its foundation. The first large collection of books was made by King Charles V. (1364-1380), who located them in a tower of the Louvre and appointed a librarian for their custody; but his successors let them be stolen, given away, or sold (the main part of them being purchased by the Duke of Bedford, in 1425), so that, of 1200 volumes it contained, less than 80 are now extant, and these are scattered all over Europe: M. Delisle has been able to trace them to their present abode, with the help of a catalogue that was compiled by the librarian, Gilles Malet, in 1373, and the original of which is now preserved in the National Library. Among more modern kings, Charles VIII. (1483-1500), Lewis XII. (1500-1515) and Francis I. (1515-1547) made most effectual efforts to collect numerous and valuable books; the last named established the Library in the royal palace at Fontainebleau, where it soon became celebrated. They took care that printed books, as well as manuscripts, were added to the collections. From their time the present Library may be said to have been in existence, for most of their books, unlike those formerly owned by Charles V., are to this day to be found on the shelves of the Bibliothèque nationale. Under Charles IX. (1560-1574), the Library was brought to Paris; in 1666, Colbert established it in his house in the Rue Vivienne, and in the eighteenth century it was removed to the palace of Mazarin, the very

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spot where it now is. In the present century several parts of the house have been rebuilt, under the superintendence of the late M. Labrouste and of his successor, the present architect, M. Pascal. The work of building is not finished. Extensive premises have been, of late years, purchased by the government, with a view to enlarging the Library, an enlargement much needed indeed.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the increase of the collections, as regards manuscripts, prints and medals, was mainly due to several very important donations and purchases, while printed volumes were obtained from the printers as a condition for the license ("privilège du Roi") without which no book could be published. During the Revolution a considerable number, both of manuscripts and printed books, were added as a consequence of the confiscation of the property of suppressed convents and churches, condemned royalists, *émigrés*, &c.

The Library now derives its increase from three sources, which are, in the order of their importance: 1. the "Dépôt légal," *i.e.*, free copies delivered, in obedience to law, by printers and engravers, of books, newspapers or prints issued by them; 2. purchases, by means of the government's yearly grants; and 3. donations, either from private individuals or from governments, institutions, societies, &c.

The organization of the National Library has been subject to numerous and frequent changes. The present organization was established by a "décret du Président de la République" (then M. Jules Grévy), dated 1885, June 17. The Library consists of four departments, viz.:—

1. "Département des Imprimés, Cartes et Collections géographiques" (*i.e.*, printed books and maps);

2. "Département des Manuscrits, Chartes et Diplômes" (manuscripts and charters);

3. "Département des Médailles, Pierres gravées et Antiques" (medals, gems, &c.);

4. "Département des Estampes" (prints or engravings).

The Staff is at present as follows:—

	SALARIES	
	French money.	British money
One "Administrateur général" ...	15,000 fr.	£600
One "Secrétaire-Trésorier," with the rank of a "Conservateur-adjoint"	7,000 fr.	£280

SALARIES.

	French money.	British money.
Four "Conservateurs," each... ...	10,000 fr.	£400
Six "Conservateurs-adjoints," each ...	7,000 fr.	£280
About fifty "Bibliothécaires," "Sous-Bibliothécaires," and "Stagiaires,"		
from	1,800 fr.	£72
to	6,000 fr.	£240

Each Conservateur has the control of one of the four departments. The Conservateur of Printed Books has five Conservateurs-adjoints to assist him, and the Conservateur of Medals has one; there are at present no Adjoints for Manuscripts and Prints. The various officials (Bibliothécaires, Sous-Bibliothécaires, Stagiaires) are distributed between the departments, the largest number being assigned to the Department of Printed Books. The Secrétariat, consisting of the Secrétaire-Trésorier and some officials, belongs to the whole Library and is independent of the four departments; the Secretary acts under immediate control of the Administrateur général. The Administrateur général is appointed by the President of the Republic, upon the recommendation of the Minister of Public Instruction; the rest of the staff are appointed by the Minister. It is customary, but not compulsory, to choose the Conservateurs and Conservateurs-adjoints from the Bibliothécaires, and these from the Sous-Bibliothécaires; the Sous-Bibliothécaires must be chosen from the Stagiaires, who have to undergo an examination before they can be promoted to that rank. No one can be appointed Stagiaire (*i.e.*, probationer), if he has not had classical or scientific education, or if over thirty years of age.

In addition to the regular staff, there are Attachés, whose work is paid by the day. They have no regular appointment; the Administrateur général can employ them and dismiss them at pleasure. Young men wishing to enter the Library service are generally required to serve for some time as Attachés, before they are proposed to the Minister for Stagiaires.

Besides the educated officials, there are "Commis," with a salary of 1,600 fr. (£64) and upwards, and "Hommes de Service," with 1,100 fr. (£44) and upwards. The "Hommes de Service" are merely Attendants; they are invariably chosen among pensioned soldiers or non-commissioned officers, the military career being considered the best training for punctual and disciplinated service. The "Commis" are a peculiar

feature of the National Library; they are chosen among the attendants who have served as such for some years, and whose work has been found most satisfactory; they are then employed for more intellectual work, and form a class intermediate, as it were, between officials and attendants. They prove, as a rule, excellent servants, both useful and cheap; their mind is not turned away from duty by literary or scientific occupation; they are thankful for the honour conferred upon them, and they make up by zeal and attention what they may lack in the matter of education.

The Department of Printed Books is by far the most important of the four. It has two reading-rooms; the "Salle publique" and the "Salle de Travail." The former is open to all persons over sixteen years of age, but they can have access there only to a limited number of books, about 25,000 volumes, chosen among those deemed to be mostly read by the public at large; it is, as it were, a library of its own, and a popular one, quite different in character from the rest of the National Library. In the "Salle de Travail" readers are only admitted with a ticket delivered at the Secretary's office, upon written application to the Administrateur général; foreigners applying for tickets are requested to show a letter of introduction from the ambassador of their country. The number of seats in that room is 328. Readers there may write for and read any printed book that exists in the department. Both rooms are open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. between October 16th and February 14th; from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. between September 16th and October 15th and between February 15th and March 31st; from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. between April 1st and September 15th; both may be occasionally closed even before 4 p.m. on dark winter days, no lights being allowed under any pretence. The "Salle de Travail" is closed on Sundays, on day of "fêtes légales" and during the fortnight before Easter; the "Salle publique" is open on Sundays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. all the year round, but is closed on "fêtes légales" and during the week before Easter.

This department possesses probably the largest amount of books to be found in any library of the world. Although no exact figure can be arrived at, the number of volumes is certainly much more than two millions; if duplicates, unbound pamphlets, parts of magazines, &c., are taken into account, it would even be over three millions. A complete catalogue does not exist as yet, but the work is in progress, and the

hope is entertained that it will come to an end within a very few years.

The system of arrangement is, in its main features, as old as the seventeenth century. It was devised under King Lewis XIV., and but slightly altered since that time. The books are distributed into subject-classes, as follows :—

THEOLOGY.

A. The Bible and its commentaries ; Talmud, &c.
B. Liturgy and Councils.
C. Holy Fathers.
D. Roman Catholic theology.
D.² Non-Catholic theology.

JURISPRUDENCE.

E. Canonic law.
*E. National and international law.
F. Civil (or secular) law.

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY.

G. General history and geography.
H. General Church history.
J. History of the Greek, the Roman, the Byzantine Empire, and Turkey.
K. History of Italy.
L. ,, France.
M. ,, Germany and Northern Europe.
N. ,, Great Britain, Ireland, and the British colonies and possessions.
O. ,, Spain and Portugal.
O.² ,, Asia.
O.³ ,, Africa.
P. ,, America.
P.² ,, Oceania.

SCIENCE AND ARTS.

Q. Bibliography ; libraries.
R. Philosophy (including morals, politics, science at large, physics, chemistry).
S. Natural history (and agriculture).
T. Medical science.
V. Arts (including technology, mechanic trades, mathematics, and fine arts).
Vm. Musical works.

LETTERS.

X. Grammar (study of languages) and rhetorics.
Y. Poetry and theatre.
Y.^{2} Novels, or prose fiction.
Z. Polygraphy, miscellaneous works, correspondences.

Up to the end of last century, all books entering the Library were catalogued and received a press-mark, consisting of class-letter, a number, and more or less other letters or figures in addition ("sous-lettres" and "sous-chiffres.") Books so catalogued are said to be "portés au catalogue" or simply "portés." They are to be found by reference to the old catalogue, consisting of large sheets of paper, one sheet for each author, with all his works entered in succession.

From about the beginning of this century to the appointment of M. Taschereau as Administrateur (1852), cataloguing was much neglected; books were simply marked with the letter of the class they belong to, without any number, and arranged alphabetically on the shelves of that class. No entry of their author and title was written anywhere, and nobody could know whether a book of that period was, or was not, in the Library, save by going to the shelves and trying to find it there. The books so treated, or rather so mishandled, are styled, in the language of the Library servants, "non-portés," or "n.p." M. Taschereau altered that bad situation in two ways: 1. he caused to be prepared and partly printed a new catalogue of classes L (history of France), T (medical science), and N to P^2 (history of Great Britain, Spain, &c.), wherein all books of those classes, whether formerly "portés" or "non-portés," are entered with exact and definite press-marks; 2. he ordered that books added to the other classes should have their titles entered on cards, and these be arranged alphabetically, so that it might be ascertained whether a book was, or was not, in the Library, and what class it had been put into. But books added to those classes continued to be arranged alphabetically on the shelves without exact press-marks ("non-portés").

This last inconvenience has been amended by M. Taschereau's successor, M. Delisle. Since January 1st, 1876, all books added to the non-catalogued classes (*i.e.*, the classes other than L, F, and N to P^2) receive an exact press-mark, consisting of the size, the class-letter and a number. They are numbered in each size of each class, from 1 upwards, according to the order of arrival. The titles are entered on cards, as formerly

practised, but these cards contain, in addition to the title and class-letter, the exact press-mark of each book. The series of books so numbered is called by the Library servants "le nouveau porte" or "le nouvel inventaire."

The work now in progress is calculated to make up for the negligence of past times, by numbering and cataloguing the non-porté books. As the old porté press-marks are often very intricate and not quite practical, it has been decided to include also porté books in that work. Books are not disturbed from their present order, porté books remaining arranged according to old press-marks, non-porté books remaining arranged alphabetically; but all are re-numbered, in that same order, from 1 upwards in each class, and cards are made for all of them, indicating on each card the old press-mark, if any, and the fresh number. Those cards are at present arranged alphabetically for each class separately; when the work is done for all classes, steps will be taken to have them arranged all in one alphabet. This work is called "inventaire;" it includes all porté and non-porté books, but neither nouveau-porté books nor books in classes catalogued since 1852 (L, T, &c.), the numbering of which is, in both cases, definite.

The sheet and card catalogues are for the sole use of the Library officials; the readers have no access to them. The following, on the contrary, are to be found in the Salle de Travail for the readers' use:—

1. Printed catalogues of classes A to E (theology and canonic law) and X to Z (letters), compiled in the eighteenth century, and including only books then extant in those classes: these are arranged systematically, with alphabetical indexes of authors.

2. Printed or lithographed catalogues of classes L (French history), T (medicine), N (British history), and O (Spanish and Portuguese history), compiled within the last forty years, and not including books added since time of compiling; these are arranged systematically; the catalogues of medicine (T) and British history (N) have alphabetical indexes of authors.

3. Abstracts of the Inventaires of classes G (general history) and K (Italian history), including the porté and non-porté books of both classes (but not the nouveau porté, *i.e.*, books addep since 1876); these are arranged only in an alphabet of authors (or, for anonymous works, in an alphabet of titles).

4. Two catalogues, on slips, of foreign books added since

1875 and French books added since 1881. The slips are cut from the two "Bulletins mensuels" of new foreign books and new French books, which M. Delisle has caused to be issued by the Library since 1875 and 1881 respectively. They are arranged in two alphabets, *viz.*, authors (or titles for anonymous works), and subjects. The alphabet of subjects, which was begun only ten years ago, was looked upon as a novelty, it being quite different from anything that had been done in the National Library to that time. It has proved very useful, and is much appreciated by the majority of readers.

Readers are requested to use these catalogues as much as possible, and to copy from them the press-marks of the books they write for, to avoid delay and mistakes. However, as no general catalogue exists at present, it cannot be made compulsory to write the press-marks on the tickets, and a great number of books are daily applied for without the applicant even knowing (or being at all able to know) whether the book he wants is in the Library or not. In those cases the librarian in charge at the central bureau, on receiving the ticket, reads the title and makes a guess as to what class the book wanted is likely to belong. He then writes the class-letter on the ticket and sends it, through an attendant, to the Commis in charge of that class in the book-store. Each class is under charge of a Commis, who has to stay all day long in the part of the store where the books of his class are kept, and to acquire as complete a knowledge of it as possible, so as to be able to deliver almost any book without searching in the catalogues. The Commis, on receiving the ticket, fetches the book on the shelves and sends it with the ticket, through a lift, to an attendant who carries it to the bureau. There an official takes up the reader's bulletin personnel (*i.e.*, a blank form given to him on entering the room, on which he had to write his name and the number of his seat), writes on it the press-mark and title of the book, and sends the book to the reader. When the reader has done with a book, he is expected to carry it back himself to the bureau and to see that a die with the word "Rendu" is stamped on his bulletin personnel. To leave the room, he must get back that bulletin and deliver it to the attendant at the door, who will not allow him to go out if all books on it are not marked "Rendu."

Recourse may be had to the catalogues, to look out books for which application has been made, only in cases of special

difficulty, which do not arise as a rule oftener than in the instance, say, of one ticket out of twenty.

The number of readers in the Salle de Travail during the year 1890 was 99,112; the number of books they got by tickets (not including books of reference in the reading room) in the same year was 398,166. From the latter figures it may be seen that the average number of books delivered each day was over 1,300.

Lending books out of the Library is not extensively carried on; it is allowed only to persons who have obtained special leave, and, in all cases, is strictly limited to duplicates or reprints.

The following figures will give an idea of the yearly increase of the Department. In the year 1890 there were added to the shelves:—

27,823 French books from the Dépôt légal;
4,415 books (chiefly foreign) from purchases;
3,595 foreign and French books from donations.

The number of books bound or sewn during the same year was as follows:

Volumes bound by private binders	12,197
,, ,, in the Atelier de Reliure within the Library	1,134
,, sewn or repaired in same Atelier	12,858
Whole number	26,189

The yearly grants for this Department are, in round figures

	French money.		British money.
For purchases	80,000 fr.	or	£3,200
For bindings	25,000 fr.	,,	£1,000

The "Section géographique," or collection of maps, is not a department of its own, but a part of the Department of Printed Books, under the control of the Conservateur of that department. It has, however, a special reading room, which is opened on the same days as the Salle de Travail, but only from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. all the year round. There is at present in it an interesting exhibition of old maps of America, some of which belong to the Section, while the rest have been lent by various institutions and private persons in Paris.

The Department of Manuscripts has a splendid reading room, rebuilt a few years ago by M. Pascal, architect to the Library, on the first floor of the house. It is open from 10 to 4.

There are printed catalogues of most parts of the collection, and catalogues of the rest are in progress. No adequate idea can be given of the importance of this department, but a few figures may be quoted to convey a slight view of the mass of manuscript matter accumulated therein. The "fonds français" has 26,484 volumes, the "fonds latin" 18,613, the "fonds grec" 4,613; there are 4,322 manuscripts in the Arabic language, 771 Sanskrit, 1,135 Turkish, &c., &c.; then, extensive collections of charters and records, miscellaneous collections relating to modern history, and last, but not least, a "Cabinet des Titres," containing the papers of the famous D'Hozier, and extensively patronized by those most tenacious bores of librarians, genealogical searchers.

The departments for Prints and for Medals are located, the former near the Salle de Travail of printed books, the latter apart from the rest of the Library, having a separate entrance in the Rue Richelieu, near the Rue des Petits-Champs. Both are open from 10 to 4. Both contain riches invaluable; of their importance the members of the Library Association will be able to form a better judgment by visiting them than from any description. The collections are partly those of the French kings during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, partly the result of purchases and donations. Among the latest should be mentioned the magnificent present made by the Duc de Luynes to the Department of Medals in 1862, consisting of his collection of ancient coins, the richest that was ever given to any public establishment by a private individual.

A number of objects from all Departments in the Library, such as early printed books, specimens of fine bindings, illuminated manuscripts, autograph letters, prints, medals, ancient gems, &c., have been selected for exhibition within the Library. They are all arranged in glass cases and labelled. The exhibition rooms are open to the public at large all the year round, every Tuesday and Friday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

An Atelier de Photographie has been added to the Library a few years since, where persons wishing to have a true copy of any book, manuscript, or print, may have it photographed at their cost, by a photographer of their own choice. The Library has or recommends no special photographer, but simply allows the use of the Atelier and takes care that no harm be done to the objects sent there for reproduction. The usefulness of this installation may be appreciated by the fact that

applicants for photographing have often to wait some time before a day can be appointed to them for their work, the use of the Atelier being bespoken by previous applicants some time in advance.

The yearly grants for the whole Library (including those already mentioned for the Department of Printed Books) are, in round figures, as follows:

	French money.	British money.
Salaries	436,000 fr.	or £17,440
Cataloguing expenses	80,000 fr.	,, £3,200
Other expenses (including purchases, bindings, heating, furniture, &c.)	272,000 fr.	,, £10,880

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